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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 002170

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: GEORGIA: ELECTORAL CODE PASSES FIRST READING,
OPPOSITION WEIGHS ITS OPTIONS

REF: A. TBILISI 2056

[1](#)B. TBILISI 2005

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN R. BASS FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) AND (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: As expected, Parliament passed draft amendments to the electoral code on the first reading and is expected to adopt the law after a second and third reading scheduled for later this month. The draft consists of the general consensus as agreed to in the framework of the NDI sponsored Electoral Law Working Group (ELWG) (ref B). Parliament is expected to provide the draft to the Venice Commission for review in early January. Meanwhile, various non-parliamentary groups are weighing their options. The Irakli Alasania-led Alliance for Georgia is likely to participate in elections despite not securing a higher threshold percentage to avoid a run-off (ref A) but faces its own internal problems. More radical opposition leaders are also rumored to be discussing some sort of protest actions in advance of the local elections scheduled to be held in May [1](#)2010. Despite elections that are six months away, the Labor party has reportedly been under pressure by the ruling UNM to also participate in local elections in order to skew the field towards their likely candidate current mayor Gigi Ugulava. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: Because the UNM holds a constitutional majority in Parliament, the passage of the election code is all but a formality. Now that the electoral ground rules have been firmly established, the pre-election maneuvering has begun in full force. Alasania and his team have discovered how difficult it is to successfully navigate within the non-parliamentary opposition, hindered by a number of bit players looking for either a political or monetary payoff for support. Labor leader Shalva Natelashvili and his solid seven percent looks to be in a position to help the UNM should Labor decide to run a candidate either by virtue of political pressure or potential financial incentives. End Comment.

MPs Pass Election Code Amendments

[1](#)3. (U) On December 4, 2009, Parliament passed the first reading of the draft law to amend the current electoral code. The draft represents the UNM proposal which was agreed upon by all of the participants in the ELWG, except the Alliance which could not agree to the proposed 30 percent threshold (ref A, ref B). The draft clarifies a few outstanding details not covered by the ELWG agreement. Notably, in the twenty-five majoritarian districts for city council seats in Tbilisi, the winner will be determined by outright plurality because no threshold will exist for these races. The twenty-five party list seats will be apportioned on a relative percentage basis for all parties that exceed a 4 percent threshold. Currently, the law will allow sitting MPs to run for Tbilisi City Council and still retain their parliamentary mandates. According to the Chairman of the Legal Committee Pavel Kubliashvili, this provision could be

revised in the second reading.

Alliance Finds the Non-Parliamentary Opposition Difficult

14. (C) Alasania confidante, Alex Petriashvili (Our Georgia - Free Democrats) told Poloff that Alasania was ninety-nine percent sure he would run for Tbilisi mayor, despite the threshold issue. Petriashvili detailed the difficulties in getting other nominal non-parliamentary allies to support them. According to Petriashvili, announced candidates Koba Davitashvili (People's Party) and Zviad Dzidziguri (Conservatives) had already approached the Alliance and named the price for their support. Petriashvili said both would either take money or certain positions should Alasania win. He told Poloff that a number of other non-parliamentary actors were also approaching them with highly conditional offers of support. Petriashvili, a former Ambassador, said he preferred dealing with Russians "because at least you knew where they stood whether or not their positions were defensible". Petriashvili also told Poloff that some of the more radical opposition leaders like Nino Burjanadze (Democratic Movement - United Georgia) and Eka Beselia (Movement for United Georgia) were looking to stage protests or other such action in advance of the May 2010 local elections to try to discredit the election process or stop it in its entirety. Petriashvili was cautiously optimistic that Alasania could win former presidential candidate Levan Gachechiladze's support and that the National Forum (5-6 percent popularity in Tbilisi) would possibly support or at least remain neutral towards Alasania's mayoral candidacy.

An Alliance Built to Last?

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15. (C) The Alasania-led Alliance still appears confused about its ultimate goals and how to achieve them. The Alliance will be meeting with American political consulting firm Aristotle this week to discuss consulting services for the upcoming local elections. Even with western political consultants, it may prove to be difficult to paper over significant problems within the Alliance itself. Republican leader, David Usupashvili is reportedly upset at a decision by Alasania and other Alliance leader, David Gamkrelidze (New Rights) to focus solely on Tbilisi elections. The Republicans, in contrast to New Rights and Our Georgia - Free Democrats, have regional strength and are looking to win seats in local councils all over Georgia. The apparent decision by Alasania and Gamkrelidze to focus all of their resources in Tbilisi puts Usupashvili in the difficult position of explaining to his party members why the Alliance is essentially leaving local Republican party members without electoral support. For his part, Alasania spends a significant portion of his time traveling outside of Georgia. He recently missed his own diplomatic corps briefing and has canceled multiple meetings with his local party leadership leading many among his ranks to question his true commitment to party building and politics. Gamkrelidze, who is well known for his long history of poor political decision making, has become the bankroller of the Alliance giving him significant leverage over its decision-making processes. None of the leadership has shown any desire to engage in retail level politics, nor have they decided what specific issues they will campaign on other than simply opposing the UNM - a strategy that has failed time and time again.

Natelashvili in an Interesting Position

16. (C) Recently, Labor MP Kakha Dzaganian (who accepted his mandate but does not participate in Parliament) asked to see Poloff to discuss his brother. (Embassy Note: It is important to note that the Labor party has a reputation for less than accurate allegations and a flair for the dramatic and hyperbolic. End Note.) Dzaganian told Poloff that his brother had been arrested, and he was subsequently approached

by MoIA (he did not specify an individual) to make a deal. According to Dzagania, the MoIA simply wanted Labor party participation in the local elections. Up to this point, Labor has maintained that it would not participate in local elections. Dzagania told Poloff that GoG representatives had previously approached Labor leader Shalva Natelashvili and offered "financial incentives" for his participation. According to Dzagania, because Natelashvili had refused, the GoG was now using more coercive measures to force the Labor party (or simply some of its leaders) to participate in local elections. (Embassy Comment: It would certainly be in UNM's interest to have Natelashvili or another Labor leader enter the race. Labor would be assured of its normal 7-10 percent vote which would not negatively affect UNM's candidate. If Labor does not participate, a significant portion of its electorate would still vote, possibly for Alasania. End Comment.) In an unrelated conversation, Alex Petriashvili told Poloff that Natelashvili was playing both sides to try to get the best deal from either the Alliance, GoG, or other political actors.

BASS